

THE REHEARSAL.

1. The Danger of being under the Censures of the Church.
2. Exemplify'd in a Parallel Case.
3. Of those who Seperat from the Church.
4. The Case of Sinfull Conditions of Communion being Impos'd.
5. Of our Seperation from Rome, and of the Dissenters from Us.
6. The Case of an Erring Conscience.
7. Of the Choice of our Guides.
8. Ignorance of the Law will not Excuse.

SATURDAY, January 4. 1706.

(1.) Country-man. **Y**OU have given me great Light, Master, in your Last, concerning the Censures of the Church. And I now see Plainly what the Power of the Keys is, to Open or to Shut the Gates of Heaven. And that there is no Entrance thither to those who Dye in Obstinate Opposition to the Church. Tho' they shou'd Repent of all their other Sins except this. And it has made so Great an Impression upon me, That I had Rather Dye ten Thousand Deaths, than to Lie Justly under the Censure of the Church.

Rehearsal. Therefore a Man ought to be very Sure that the Censure of the Church is Unjustly pass'd against him. For he ventures his Soul upon it.

And again, Suppose it be Unjustly pass'd, yet he is still under the Condemnation, if he Behave himself Proudly and in Contempt of the Church.

(2.) Let me make this Plain to you by a Familiar Comparisn. Suppose a Man Condemn'd to Dye, and Unjustly, that he is not Guilty of the Crime laid against him. And he shou'd say, I know the King can Pardon me, and therefore he shou'd Revile the Judge, and Trample upon the Authority of the Court, and apply himself to the King. Wou'd not the King tell him, That it was His Authority by which the Judge Acted, and which he had Vilify'd and Traduc'd; And that He was Oblig'd to Support and Maintain the Authority of His Ministers, for that it was His own Authority. And is Despising and Trampling upon the King's Authority, the way to Procure his Pardon? And to say, That the Judge had no Power to Condemn him, tho he was Vested with the King's Commission.

Country-m. The Case is Plain and Parallel. If I Appeal to God from the Censure of the Church, because of my Innocence, I must not Revile the Church, and Deny her Authority, for it is Given her of God. And it is His Authority which I Deny and Vilify. And instead of Procuring my Pardon, I add a New Sin of Rebellion against God. As Moses said to Korah, what is Aaron, that you Murmur against him? Your Rebellion is against the Lord.

(3.) But, Master, if the Case be so with the Excommunicat Person, what is the Condition of those who go out of the Church, and Leave her?

Rehearsal. They Excommunicate themselves. And with this Aggravation, That it is their own Act and Deed. Whereas a Man may be Excommunicated wrongfully, as we have said. And it is more Provoking to any Society for one of its Members to Snarle at it, and Leave it; than if they Dis-franchiz'd him, and Turn'd him out.

(4.) Country-m. But Suppose Sinfull Conditions of Communion be Impos'd upon us in any Church, what must we do in that Case?

Rehearsal. We must not Comply with any thing we Think Sinfull, for that is offending against Conscience.

But then we must take Great Care to Inform our Conscience aright. Because in this Case, as I said before, we Pawn our Souls upon it. For if the Conditions Impos'd upon me be not Sinfull, and I Separat for them, then I Separat and Excommunicat my self, without Just Cause; which makes my Separation a Schism, and Cuts me off from the Body of the Church. Which being so Great a Sin, even the Tearing CHRIST's Body in Pieces, we ought not to Venture upon it, Unless the Condition Impos'd upon us be as Plainly and Visibly a Sin as Schism is. Therefore if I only Doubt that such a thing is a Sin, I must not Break off from the Church for it; because that is Running upon a Certain Sin, to avoid a Doubtfull one. So that I must be very Sure the Condition Impos'd upon me is a Sin, before I Separat for it; so Sure, as that I am willing to Stake my Soul upon it.

In the next place, we must be well Aware that what we Separat for, is Requir'd of Us as a Condition of Communion. Otherwise we are not to Separat for it, not for every thing that is not Justifiable in the Practice of a Church. Because we may keep our selves from such a Practice, and yet keep in the Communion of the Church.

(5.) Now, Country-man, I desire you to look over again my Rehearsal, N. 20. Where you will find, That nothing is requir'd

as a Condition of Communion in the Church of England but the Apostles Creed. And that it is not so in the Church of Rome. And therefore tho' we had Just Cause to Seperat from the Church of Rome; Yet our Dissenters had no manner of Cause to Seperat from the Church of England. And therefore, That their Seperation is a Schism, but not Ours from the Church of Rome. For that Church is Guilty of their Separation who Part from her for Sinful Conditions of Communion Impos'd. And such Separation is no Schism.

Country-m. I carry your Rehearsal N. 20. commonly in my Pocket, and think you have made it out as clear as the Sun against the Dissenters. I have Battel'd several of them upon it, and cannot find they have a word to Answer.

(6.) But now, Master, after all, what if a Man cannot satisfy his Conscience, but still Thinks such a thing to be a Sin; What shall he do? If he Complys with it, it is a Sin to him; And if he Breaks off for it, he thrusts himself out of the Church. This is a Lamentable Condition.

Rehears. It is so. This is the Case of an Erring Conscience, it involves us in Sin either way. This is a strong Reason to lay aside Prejudice, Partiality and Worldly Interest, in matters of Religion; least they Sway our Judgment, and bring us into this Lamentable Condition.

But some Men think they are Safe, and that all is Well with them, if they follow their Conscience in every thing. They know no Higher Judge than Conscience. They forget that the Holy Scriptures are given as a Rule to our Conscience. And we are Oblig'd by the Law of God, whether we Think so or not. Else we might Harden our Conscience, and then we were Safe! We might let our Passions and our Lusts Blind the Eye of our Reason, and Hurry us whether they List, and we wou'd be Un-Accountable for this, because we follow'd our Conscience! We might Wink and Shut our Eyes, and not See the Way that is set before Us, and then say, How can a Blind Man See? But the Case of a Blind Man is Safer than this. If a Blind Man falls into the Ditch, it is his Misfortune, not his Fault: But his Blood will lye upon his own Head who will not See his Way, nor take the Help of Guides; of those Guides whom God has Appointed. Such Guides as shew Us the Plan of the Way that God has given them, that is, the Holy Scriptures, that we may See with our own Eyes that every Step we take is Right. Not as the Church of Rome, which Locks up the Scriptures from the People, and bid them Trust wholly to their Guides, without Examination; upon Pretence that sometimes they make ill use of the Scriptures, and Pervert them to their own Destruction. Which is, as if I shou'd Refuse my Children Meat, because some have Over Gorg'd themselves, and some have been Poison'd with it. But tho' we ought to Pay a great deal of Deference to those Guides whom God has set over Us, and to Learn the Law from their Mouths; yet, because they are not Infallible, that Guide is Justly to be Suspected who wou'd Lead Us Blindfold, and not let us See our Way. It is very like the Case of the Blind leading the Blind. Where we have Choice of Guides that have the Commission of God, one wou'd cer-

tainly Choose that Guide who wou'd lead Us with our Eyes Open, rather than him who wou'd require Us to Shut our Eyes. This is the Case of the Episcopal Reformation of England, from those Guides who wou'd neither let us Read the Holy Scriptures, nor Understand our Prayers.

(7.) But now to put the Case to the utmost Extremity, suppose a Man to be Blind, that is, so very Ignorant as not to be Able to See his Way; if he is Misled by that Guide whom God has set over him, he is Safer than if he were Misled by himself, or by any other Guide whom God had not Appointed, but whom the Blind Man Fancy'd to Chuse for himself; because he do's this at his own Hazard, and his Misfortune must be laid at his own Door.

Tho' it is not well supposable that a Man so very Ignorant shou'd be Capable to Chuse his Guide, that Requiring more Skill and Knowledge than such a Man can be Master of. And such Ignorant Men are most Easily Impos'd upon by False and Designing Guides, who Send themselves, and have Ends of their own to serve. Witness the sad Face of Affairs in the great Rebellion, when, the Church being Pull'd down, every one was left to chuse Guides for himself; and presently England saw above three Score different Religions, Rise up as it were in a moment; The Names of all which are given us in Books wrote at that time, as in Heresography, Gangrena, &c. And the Roots of them are still in our Ground, and have Sprouted forth abundantly of Late. Yet all these Pretended to Act according to their Conscience, and no Doubt many of them did so, being under such Strong Delusion as to Believe all these Lyes. And this came upon them, through their Itching Ears, Heaping to themselves Teachers. The sad Fate of England at this Day! Which this Book of the Rights is helping forward, by setting up the same Principles,

Our Saviour told of those who shou'd Think they did God Service in Murdering His Apostles. Were they therefor Innocent, because they Acted according to their Conscience? St. Paul was Verily Perswaded that he Ought to do many things against Jesus of Nazareth, yet afterwards call'd himself the Greatest of Sinners for so doing.

(8.) I hope this will Caution other Men to keep a Guard over their Conscience, and to take all due means to have it Rightly Inform'd. And will convince them, That Pleading their Conscience will not Excuse them, if they Transgress the Law of Christ. As Ignorance of the Law will not Excuse any Man at an Earthly Tribunal. For every Man is bound to know the Law at his Peril, so far as concerns himself.

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